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IS JESUS A HISTORICAL CHARACTER? EVIDENCE FOR AN AFFIRMATIVE OPINION

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On a former occasion we examined the arguments put forward in denial of Jesus' historicity.¹ They were found to be altogether inadequate as proof that the Jesus of whom the New Testament writers speak is a purely fictitious character. The prospects of success for this hypothesis seem to be slight, and no vital and widespread interest in it seems to be imminent. Unless its advocates can offer more substantial reasons for their skepticism, and can make the constructive side of their argument agree more closely with all the data in the field of primitive Christian history, they can scarcely hope to win a following among investigators who are accustomed to treat historical materials comprehensively.² This does not mean that we have no real problems. As everyone knows, many serious historical difficulties regarding Jesus are quite generally recognized today. The definite determination of his words and deeds, or the question of historical substantiation of the ideas which traditional Christology has connected with his person, are now felt to be timely and important topics for investigation, but no evident necessity is commonly recognized for asking, Did a historical Jesus ever live?

Yet when the question is asked can an affirmative answer be formulated sufficiently strong to prove, beyond the possibility of a reasonable doubt, that Jesus is truly a historical character? It may not be inappropriate to set forth here some specific

¹ In this Journal for January, 1911, pp. 20-42.

² In the opinion of J. Weiss the arguments of the radicals in this controversy are worse than worthless: "Ich habe mich aufs neue überzeugt, dass es die schwerste Aufgabe von der Welt ist, dem Unsinn zu beweisen, dass er Unsinn ist. Oft habe ich mich geschämt, geschämt für unsere deutsche Wissenschaft, die lange brauchen wird, ehe sie diesen Flecken abgewaschen hat, geschämt für mich, dass ich mich mit solchem Kram beschäftigen muss."—*Jesus von Nazareth*, 4.

reasons for believing in his historicity, especially since those who adhere to the opposite view sometimes urge that they are not compelled to defend their opinion, but may assume it outright, unless a convincing argument for historicity is advanced. It is not enough that one should point as proof to the uniformity of Christian opinion today, or to Christian tradition of the past, for it must be granted that not the Jesus of history but rather the risen and heavenly Christ of faith has held the central position in Christian interpretation. This state of affairs existed even as early as the time of Paul who, it will be remembered, had relatively little to say of an earthly Jesus apart from the thought of his becoming the heaven-exalted individual who was soon to come in judgment.

To be sure, it may be difficult to imagine that the Christ of faith could in the first instance have come to occupy the place he did without the reality of an earthly Jesus. But to assume this connection as a presupposition is to beg the question at issue. Moreover, the New Testament records are now admitted to contain some elements created by the pious fancy of primitive believers; and since disagreement among the critics seems to make the decision upon questions of historicity sometimes largely a matter of taste, may not belief in the very existence of Jesus ultimately belong in this same category? So it is sometimes argued. Therefore we ask, What can be said in support of the claim that the incentive for the new religious movement, and for the literature it produced, was derived from a historical Jesus? We shall not be concerned here to determine the amount of information about him now available; we confine attention to the single issue, Did Jesus ever live?

The obscurity enshrouding the beginnings of Christianity makes our task a difficult one. At first the adherents of the new faith seem to have had no idea of any prolonged propaganda, or of a time when, after the first generation should have passed away, information about the thought and life of the community would need to be derived from written sources. Great value is naturally attached to Paul's letters since they are the earliest extant Christian writings, yet these were not composed with any deliberate purpose

of instructing posterity, or even of expounding the content of contemporary thinking, but rather to meet the special exigencies of that day. And it is well known that the literature which purports to narrate the story of Jesus' career has no immediate connection with the first days of Christianity. Mark, though the earliest gospel, was written at a time when the author would be compelled to thread his way back to Jesus through from thirty to forty years of development in the thought and life of the church, and that too in a period when tradition was in its most fluid state. The other evangelists were under a similar necessity, the difficulty being perhaps greater in their case since they were chronologically farther removed from the original events. Nor is it at all certain that any evangelist made an effort to write the *pure facts* of history; his interest was to make the story he told count in favor of the type of faith which he preached, and which appealed to him as being the true interpretation of the history.³ What the later church found itself believing and doing, as the result of the circumstances which molded its early life, this its theologians, in all good conscience, to be sure, naturally endeavored to find warrant for in the life and teaching of Jesus. Had the evangelists failed to appreciate this demand of their time there would have been but slight occasion for them to write anything, and still less probability that what they wrote would have been preserved.

If interest in recording the story of Jesus' life was a secondary development within Christianity itself, it is not surprising that he is almost entirely ignored in extra-Christian sources. There is no certainty that Josephus spoke from first-hand knowledge, even if the passage in Josephus is genuine.⁴ Tacitus' mention of Chris-

³ Cf. Luke 1:4; John 20:31.

⁴ J. Weiss, *Jesus von Nazareth*, 88 f., is disposed to take the Josephus passage as genuine. Other scholars think the very language used—the implication of Jesus' divinity, reference to his miracles, recognition of his messiahship, and the like—marks the material as a Christian interpolation. The paragraph reads: *Γίνεται δὲ κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον Ἰησοῦς σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, εἶγε ἀνδρα αὐτὸν λέγειν χρή· ἦν γὰρ παραδόξων ἔργων ποιητής, διδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡδονῇ τἀληθῇ δεχομένων, καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν Ἰουδαίους, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἐπηγάγετο· ὁ χριστὸς οὗτος ἦν. καὶ αὐτὸν ἐνδείξει τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν παρ' ἡμῶν σταυρῷ ἐπιτετιμηκὸς Πιλάτου οὐκ ἐπαύσαντο οἱ τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαπήσαντες· ἐφάνη γὰρ αὐτοῖς τρίτην ἔχων ἡμέραν πάλιν ζῶν τῶν θείων προφητῶν ταυτὰ τε καὶ ἄλλα μυρία περὶ αὐτοῦ θαυμάσια εἰρηκότων. εἰς ἔτι τε νῦν τῶν*

tians in Rome in Nero's day, named from "Christ" who had been killed by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius, is of little value as an independent witness for the life of Jesus, since a Roman historian writing about 110 A.D. may well have obtained this information from current tradition.⁵ Suetonius, though writing perhaps a decade later, is very much in the dark on the subject. He seems to have heard of the name "Christ," but he fails to distinguish between Jews and Christians.⁶

Since reference to Jesus is so uncertain in non-Christian sources for the first century, it is sometimes urged that belief in his existence was not then current.⁷ While it must be admitted that sources for this period are very meager, Jewish silence might seem particularly surprising. But the Mishna and Talmud as known today are literary products of a subsequent date, and their references to Jesus most naturally reflect only the later phases of the

Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ τοῦδε ὀνομασμένον οὐκ ἐπέλιπε τὸ φῶλον (*Ant.*, XVIII, 3, 3). There is perhaps less reason to doubt the reference to James, "the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ" (ἄτε δὴ οὖν τοιοῦτος ὢν ὁ Ἀνανος, νομίσας ἔχειν καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον διὰ τὸ τεθνάναι μὲν Φῆστον, Ἀλβῖνον δ' ἔτι κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ὑπάρχειν, καθίζει συνέδριον κριτῶν καὶ παραγαγὼν εἰς αὐτὸ τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἰησοῦ τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ, Ἰάκωβος ὄνομα αὐτῷ, καὶ τινὰς ἑτέροισι, ὡς παρανομησάντων κατηγορίαν ποιησάμενος παρέδωκε λευσθησόμενους.—*Ant.*, XX, 9, 1).

⁵ Even the authenticity of Tacitus at this point has been doubted (e.g., by Drews, *Christusmythe*, 179, following Hochart, *Études au sujet de la persécution des Chrétiens sous Néron*, 1885, 222-37), but the language certainly is not "Christian" in its point of view: "ergo abolendi rumori [that he had himself burned Rome] Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis affecit quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat. auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat, repressaque in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursum erumpebat non modo per Judeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque."—*Annals*, XV, 44.

⁶ In *Claud.* 25 he states that the Jews "who raised a constant commotion under the guidance of a certain Christ" were banished from Rome by the emperor ("Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit"). Perhaps this expulsion took place about 50 A.D., and if we may infer, from Suetonius' unintelligent references to the situation, that the disturbance was due to controversy between Christians and Jews, we have here an evidence of the early spread of Christianity to the capital. Paul's letter to the Romans less than ten years later also implies an early date for the planting of the new faith in Rome.

⁷ Steudel is particularly insistent upon the negative significance of this silence (*Wir Gelehrten vom Fach!* 17-30). A very different estimate is reached by von Soden (*Hat Jesus gelebt?* 9-14) and J. Weiss (*Jesus von Nazareth*, 85-94).

conflict between Judaism and Christianity.⁸ That Philo ignored the subject, even if it had come to his attention, can hardly surprise us; nor is it remarkable that Justus of Tiberius, in a very brief chronicle of Jewish kings, found no occasion to mention Jesus. In Josephus only does this silence press for an explanation. He records with some fulness Jewish history in the first century A.D., but never refers to Jesus and his followers, or, at most, very briefly.⁹ Various reasons for this oversight have been suggested. As illustrated in his treatment of the Book of Daniel, Josephus slurs over the messianic hopes of the Jews; and to derive from a Jewish source Christianity, in his day an unpopular movement in the eyes of the Roman state, would not have added to the respect for his ancestors and their religion which he sought to inspire in his readers.¹⁰ But is it not quite possible that indifference on his part is the main reason for silence? He may not have thought this movement particularly significant, and, so far as it had come to public notice, it was no doubt mainly confined to the lower classes of society with whom a contemporary historian would have little concern, especially if, as in Josephus' case, he assumed the Roman point of view.¹¹ Indeed, as for the story of Jesus' life, only those who were personally interested in him were concerned with this subject, and even they do not seem to have been thoroughly alive to this interest at the very beginning of the new religious movement.

⁸ Cf. Strack, *Jesus, die Häretiker und die Christen nach den ältesten jüdischen Angaben* (1910).

⁹ Cf. note 4 above.

¹⁰ Concerning Josephus' treatment of the Christians, Jülicher says: "Von ihnen zu schweigen war klügere Taktik, als sie mühsam von den Rockschössen abzuschütteln."—*Hat Jesus gelebt?* 19. Similarly Weinle: "Der Grund liegt aber nicht im Christentum oder in der Nichtexistenz Jesu, sondern bei Josephus, der übrigens auch von Johannes dem Täufer und von der ganzen messianischen Bewegung in seinem Volk in einer Weise erzählt, die den Römern die Juden als möglichst harmlose und ruhige, philosophische Staatsbürger darstellen soll."—*Ist das "liberale" Jesusbild widerlegt?* 107. J. Weiss is of a different opinion: "Es ist eher, wie mir scheint, ein Zeichen freundlicher, mindestens objektiver Gesinnung, dass Josephus die Christen und ihren Gründer nicht erwähnt—wenn er sie nicht erwähnt."—*Jesus von Nazareth*, 91; cf. note 4 above.

¹¹ Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (1908), 209, cites an interesting modern illustration of this point.

The result is that practically all our information about Jesus must be derived from the words of his friends who were interested to show him worthy of veneration—the very fiber of their thinking made anything else impossible. While there seems to be abundant evidence that Christianity was in existence by the end of the first century, there certainly is no contemporary account of its beginnings, much less such an account of the life of its alleged founder. In its earliest documents, the epistles of Paul, Jesus appears as the heaven-exalted Lord whom believers reverence almost as God himself. Consequently it has been claimed that the New Testament representation of Jesus is inconceivable as starting from recollections of a real person. It is felt that the memory of his human limitations must have been too vivid to admit of so bold an idealization by his personal companions; the situation is explicable only on the assumption that Jesus was primarily an anthropomorphized god, not a deified man.¹²

This contention cannot be given great weight, for it will be remembered that the deification of men was not unknown to this age; and if it is objected that Jesus had done nothing to prompt belief in him as a heaven-exalted hero—that he was no world-conquering Alexander—one may urge that his heroic suffering was the pathway by which he ascended to heavenly honors. If a priori considerations are to be urged, is it not quite impossible to imagine a company of believers claiming to have been companions of a fictitious person and reverencing him even to the extent of sacrificing their lives for his cause? There are two factors in this situation which distinguish it from the mythical anthropomorphizing of deities: the order of progress in early interpretation is from Jesus the man to Christ the heavenly Lord, and emphasis falls upon the proximity of the events. Already we have shown that the evolution of New Testament thought about Jesus starts from his activity as a man and proceeds by degrees to read back divine qualities into his earthly career.¹³ As for the element of proximity, it is true that no New Testament book is unquestionably the work of a personal follower of Jesus, but that part of

¹² E.g., Drews, *Christusmythe*, 29 f.

¹³ Cf. pp. 33–35 of the article cited above, note 1.

the literature which is commonly supposed to have been written by persons who had intimate acquaintances with eyewitnesses, if not slight acquaintance with Jesus, is considerable; for example, the Gospel of Mark and the letters of Paul, to mention only those books whose authorship is least in dispute.¹⁴ The general impression which many New Testament writings make on the reader is that the unique phenomena behind the New Testament faith, and the person whom it reverences, are not projected into some remote past but have appeared within the memory of men still living.

Especially important in this connection are the so-called Pauline epistles. According to tradition they were written mostly in the sixth decade of the first century, and they are so definite in their reference to the historical Jesus that their spuriousness, either wholly or in part, is commonly admitted to be a necessary presupposition for the denial of Jesus' historicity. If not genuine they must have been the product of an age when both Jesus and Paul belonged to so remote a past that there was little danger of any serious difficulty in accepting as real their assumed existence. It is true that among primitive peoples historical feeling is not exacting in its demands and the borderland between fancy and fact is often vague, so perhaps the lapse of only a few decades would make the launching of this fiction possible, but it can hardly have been successfully accomplished among men who personally knew the times and places in which these fictitious characters were assumed to have lived. Consequently the Pauline section of the New Testament literature is commonly regarded as a pseudepigraphic product by those who argue against the historicity of Jesus.¹⁵ In all fairness, however, we may note that no thorough-

¹⁴ The contention made by J. Weiss in his *Paulus und Jesus* (1909), that Paul in II Cor. 5:16 claims a personal acquaintanceship with the earthly Jesus, seems precarious. But of course Paul had ample opportunity after his conversion to learn from personal followers of Jesus, as pointed out in *The American Journal of Theology* for April, 1907, pp. 269 ff. Mark may have had some personal recollection of Jesus' last week in Jerusalem (cf. Mark 14:51 f.), and he certainly was intimately associated with the first generation of Christians.

¹⁵ Drews stands almost alone in holding to the historicity of Paul and denying that of Jesus, though a convenient freedom is allowed in striking out as later insertions such passages of Paul's letters as seem too emphatic in pointing to a historical

going effort has been made by recent writers on this theme to prove the spuriousness of all Paul's letters.¹⁶ Rather is it commonly assumed that no substantial argument for genuineness can be offered and that the theory of pseudonymity is capable of explaining all the data.

This theory is not of itself impossible, particularly for an age whose literary method was to set forth teaching under the authority of persons prominent in the past. The names of Moses, Enoch, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, were used in this way, so that prominent figures in early Christian history were quite naturally made to play a similar rôle. Since the Christians of the second and third centuries rejected some writings put forward under the name of Peter and of Paul because the marks of pseudepigraphy seemed evident, it is certainly proper in the interests of accurate scholarship to ask whether those who made the canonical selection were sufficiently exact in distinguishing between the genuine and the spurious. The very fact that some pseudepigraphic writings are known to have been in circulation opens the way for the supposition that still more may have been of this character; and, indeed, present-day criticism, of even the moderately conservative type, has accustomed us to thinking of the so-called Pastoral Epistles, if not indeed of some other alleged Pauline letters, as belonging in this class of literature. But if some letters are spurious, then may not all be so? This possibility is appealed to by those who do not treat seriously the probability of genuineness in the case of any writing in the Pauline collection, thus seeking to relieve themselves of the responsibility of proving spuriousness and throwing the whole burden of proof upon the one who entertains

Jesus (*Christusmythe*³, 120-63). Similarly Steudel, speaking of such passages as I Cor. 9:14; 11:23 ff.; 15:1 ff.: "Wenn diese Stellen *nicht* eingeschoben sind, dann gibt es im Alten und Neuen Testament überhaupt keine Interpolate."—*Wir Gelehrten vom Fach!* 65.

¹⁶ In order to be brought up to date, if for no other reason, B. Bauer's arguments (*Kritik der paulinischen Briefe*, 1850-52) need revision. The negative position of the Dutch school, represented in more recent times by van Manen, or of the Swiss scholar Steck, is sometimes cited in this connection; but this cannot be done legitimately since the theory of Jesus' non-historicity would of itself invalidate the arguments of these critics.

the more usual opinion that the chief epistles of Paul are historical documents of first importance.

The genuineness of the principal Pauline epistles is among the most generally accepted conclusions of what may be called modern critical opinion.¹⁷ The evidence for this acceptance is usually regarded as exceptionally good. For instance, Clement of Rome, near the close of the first century A.D., writing to the Corinthians not only calls to mind Paul's life as a "notable pattern of patient endurance" but exhorts his readers to peruse again "the epistle of the blessed Paul" which he wrote them in "the beginning of the gospel," and in which he charged them to avoid all party spirit.¹⁸ Here is clearly a reference to our canonical First Corinthians. Furthermore, Clement's letter often shows in thought and language very strong resemblances to Paul's writings.¹⁹ The evidence of Ignatius, from the first quarter of the second century, is less specific; but Marcion, a few years later, is a most significant witness. He attached so much value to the principal Pauline letters that he would make them his main scriptural authority; and the rest of the church, while it regarded Marcion as a heretic, did not dispute his high estimate of these writings, although it

¹⁷ The status of present opinion is too well known to need detailed statement here. The extreme views of B. Bauer and of the Dutch school are quite generally discarded. Steck (*Der Galaterbrief* [1888]), though he admits the possibility of a few Pauline fragments in Romans, has not won adherents for his skeptical opinions. The partition hypotheses of, e.g., Völter (*Die Komposition der paulinischen Briefe* [1890]) and R. Scott (*The Pauline Epistles* [1909]), are not looked upon with even partial favor among specialists in this field. The results of the Tübingen criticism, reworked to meet the requirements of later investigation, leave not only Galatians, I and II Corinthians, and Romans as unquestionably Pauline, but also Philippians and I Thessalonians. Colossians, Ephesians, and II Thessalonians are nowadays less widely rejected than formerly, and even the Pastorals are thought to contain some Pauline elements.

¹⁸ Clem. 5:5 ff.; 47:1 ff.

¹⁹ As an example compare Paul's thought and phraseology in I Cor., chap. 13, with Clem. 49:1-5: 'Ο ἔχων ἀγάπην ἐν Χριστῷ ποιησάτω τὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ παραγγέλματα. τὸν δεσμὸν τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ τίς δύναται ἐξηγήσασθαι; τὸ μεγαλεῖον τῆς καλλονῆς αὐτοῦ τίς ἀρκετὸς ἐξείπειν; τὸ ὕψος εἰς ὃ ἀνάγει ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνεκδιήγητόν ἐστιν. ἀγάπη κολλᾷ ἡμᾶς τῷ θεῷ· ἀγάπη καλύπτει πλῆθος ἁμαρτιῶν· ἀγάπη πάντα ἀνέχεται, πάντα μακροθυμεῖ· οὐδὲν βάνουσιν ἐν ἀγάπῃ, οὐδὲν ὑπερήφανον· ἀγάπη σχίσμα οὐκ ἔχει, ἀγάπη οὐ στασιάζει, ἀγάπη πάντα ποιεῖ ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ· ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ ἐτελειώθησαν πάντες οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ· δίχρα ἀγάπης οὐδὲν εὐάρεστον ἐστὶν τῷ θεῷ.

did not hold to them quite so exclusively as Marcion did. By the end of the century several available sources of information bear similar testimony to the Pauline authorship of this part of the New Testament.

Yet this external evidence which appeals so strongly to many investigators is easily set aside as itself spurious by those who deny the genuineness of the literature traditionally connected with Paul's name. Doubtless this procedure seems arbitrary and subjective to one who is accustomed to weigh all the historical evidence with care, nevertheless the type of argument which is usually directed against the historicity of Jesus and of Paul does not seem sensitive to statistics of this sort. Consequently any attempt to meet this skeptical argument on its own ground must proceed mainly from considerations, perhaps more or less general and *a priori*, based upon the content of the literature in question. Here lie before us certain documents which purport to belong to a definite historical setting. On the strength of the internal evidence do the probabilities seem to favor the genuineness of this representation, or does close examination show that the picture is a later fabrication depicting an idealized period in the past? We may present a few considerations which seem to us to turn the scales decisively in favor of genuineness.

One of the first canons of a pseudonymous writer is that the individual impersonated shall take the point of view and think the thoughts of the actual writer, and of the age to which he belongs. His primary motive is to claim the support of a great name for his own opinions. Now the Pauline literature contains elements which do not answer to this situation. In the first place, the realistic eschatology credited to Paul, whose active career is pictured as belonging near the middle of the first century A.D., will hardly have been invented at a later date when subsequent history had proved the falsity of such expectations. Yet this idea is pervasive in the writings which are assumed to be put forward here in Paul's name. The Romans are told that the night is far spent and the day is at hand when all shall stand before the judgment seat.²⁰ Marriage is discouraged among the Corin-

²⁰ Rom. 13:12; 14:10; cf. II Cor. 5:10.

thians because of the shortness of the time;²¹ they are commended for their attitude in "waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ," and are exhorted to refrain from judging one another in view of the near approach of the final judgment—"judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."²² In the closing words of the first letter they are reminded of the immediateness which characterized the primitive hope as expressed in the phrase *marana tha*. Speaking of the Philippians, Paul is confident that God who has begun a good work in them "will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ," further Paul expects them to remain "void of offence unto the day of Christ" and encourages them to stand fast confident that "the Lord is at hand."²³ The Thessalonians are called to serve the true God and to "wait for his son from heaven which delivereth us from the wrath to come," and they are advised to live a holy life that they may stand blameless before God "at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints," for his coming will be sudden like that of a thief in the night. The hope is for those that are now alive who are to be caught up in the air to meet the Lord, and Paul closes his letter with the pious wish that their "spirit and soul and body be preserved entire without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."²⁴ History proved that these vivid expectations of the end of the world were not to be realized, and an impersonator will hardly have created for his hero ideas that would discredit him in the eyes of a later generation.²⁵

²¹ I Cor. 7:29 ff.

²² I Cor. 1:7 ff.; 4:5.

²³ Philip. 1:6, 10; 4:5.

²⁴ I Thess. 1:10; 3:13; 4:15-18; 5:2, 23.

²⁵ Belief in the immediateness of Jesus' return gradually became less vivid as time wore on. Even within the New Testament period this change is marked. Paul looks for the coming soon, expecting, until toward the close of his life, at least, to see it in his own day. Mark thinks "some" of Jesus' personal followers will live to see the day (9:1; 13:30), but before it comes the gospel must be preached to all the nations (13:10). Though no one may know the exact time, the tribulation attending the siege and fall of Jerusalem is a premonition of the end which is to come suddenly (13:24-37). The writers of Matthew and Luke have a similar idea, though a little farther postponed. The former changes Mark's "in those days after that tribulation" to "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (Matt. 24:29), while in Luke a period of some length subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem must be awaited "until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). The writer of

Against the hypothesis of pseudonymity we may set also the minute biographical details of the epistles. Sometimes data are given purposely to tell the story of Paul's life, as when the Galatians are informed of his career from the time of his conversion until the meeting at Jerusalem;²⁶ but more commonly the mention of his doings is entirely subordinate to the main line of thought. For example, he briefly notes in closing his letter to the Romans that he is on the point of going up to Jerusalem with a gift for the saints, and after fulfilling this mission he hopes to proceed to Rome.²⁷ He also tells the Corinthians in a few closing words that he hopes to come to them by way of Macedonia, though at present he is in Ephesus where he will remain until Pentecost.²⁸ The list of these details could be enlarged, if necessary, and they are all the more significant because they usually come in quite incidentally and show no disposition on the part of the author to give a full account of the apostle's career. Had an impersonator wished to make Paul tell his own life-story we can easily imagine that he may have been sufficiently skilful to invent details, but under those circumstances the information would surely have been more uniformly distributed and its lifelike quality less pronounced. The very incompleteness of the material as a whole, together with the exactness of detail at certain points, even where the information conveyed is relatively unimportant, seems a strong credential for the genuineness of these letters.

A similar inference may be drawn from the realistic elements in the general historical situation. How strongly one feels the heart-throb of reality in Paul's passionate appeal to the Galatians not to apostatize from the true faith; or in the more extensive Corinthian correspondence regarding living problems in the primitive church? The personal element is particularly pro-

II Peter 3:8-10 apologized for the delay by asserting that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In the Fourth Gospel the idea of a literal return has disappeared and the coming of Jesus in spiritual form as the Paraclete has taken its place—an idea which later interpreters have often tried to read back into the Synoptic Gospels and the Pauline letters. This whole progression of thought throws an interesting light on the primitive character and the genuineness of the notions credited to Paul.

²⁶ Gal. 1:15-2:1.

²⁷ Rom. 15:25.

²⁸ I Cor. 16:5-9.

nounced. One has only to read in Acts the narrative for the corresponding periods of Paul's career to feel the difference in spirit between the representation of one who actually participated in the events and the description of him by a subsequent narrator. Having once met Paul in his capacity as a Christian missionary in Acts one knows what to expect of him on all future occasions; he moves on with stately tread, always presenting to view the same somewhat stereotyped features. There is variety, to be sure, but it is the type of variety one finds in the colors of a portrait rather than in the changing aspects of real life. In Paul's letters, on the other hand, there is no conventionalized portrait of his personality. He appears there as one who is vitally influenced by actual experience, making a normal response through the free play of changing moods.

To illustrate this point, according to Acts he goes up to Jerusalem at the instigation of the church in Antioch to discuss the problem of the gentile Christians' obligations to the law; the facts of the gentile mission are calmly rehearsed, the decision is made in favor of Paul's position, he retires to Antioch, and then moves on quietly to further evangelization. We are given no hint of the anxiety he felt on this occasion, nor do we appreciate the personal energy he expended on the problem. But turn to Galatians and how different is the situation! Anxiety for the future welfare of his brethren in the gentile churches prompts him to push the question to a decision in Jerusalem; in order to make the problem pointed, and thus to avoid future misunderstandings, he puts Titus forward as a test case; with nervous energy he presses the issue almost to the point of belligerency; he wins the decision, but his joy is short-lived for, on returning to Antioch, new conditions develop which result not only in a break with Peter but in the severance of relations with his friend and former traveling companion, Barnabas. We are left at last with no picture of an ideal victory for Paul but with a very realistic situation: his efforts had at first seemed successful, in the flush of victory new troubles broke out, the result was not only the antagonism of the Jerusalem church but separation from Peter and Barnabas, and to what extent Paul was able still to hold the sympathies of the Antiochian church

may be questioned. Here is no idealization in favor of either party, but a break which shows its raw edges just as we are wont to find them in the experiences of real life. So it is throughout Paul's entire career as portrayed in his letters.

To a remarkable degree his personality, as revealed in these writings, rings true to reality. He represents himself as possessing a strongly emotional temperament; he is exceptionally efficient in speaking with tongues, he is on occasion caught up into the seventh heaven, visions and revelations of the Lord are often his privilege. And this is the type of person he proves to be in the ordinary relations of daily life. On hearing of the trouble in Galatia his emotions are deeply stirred, he calls down anathemas upon the disturbers and upbraids the Christians for their fickleness, then he pleads in gentle tones with his "little children" for whom he is again in travail. The same interplay of feelings is even more strongly marked in the story of his relations with the Corinthians. Now he threatens the rod but in the next breath he expresses the hope that they will permit him to come to them "in love and a spirit of gentleness"; and when the crisis becomes exceptionally critical instead of visiting them in severity he writes a letter "out of much affliction" and "with many tears." At one time he commends himself in extravagant language, and then his sensitive nature seems to recoil and he pleads with his readers to bear with him "in a little foolishness," since circumstances compel him to defend his rights as an apostle. Later in his career, when his own fate seems to be hanging in the balances, he alternates between despair and hope in truly normal fashion and, as he reflects upon the possibilities for the future, two conflicting desires rise within him: to depart and be with Christ is better for him, yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for the churches. In all this one sees not a made-up character of the stage but an actual person who traversed wide ranges of human experience.

Finally, the realistic character of Paul's work, the vigor of his thought, and the uniqueness of his letters show him to have been a genuinely vital factor in the propagation of the new religion. On the supposition of spuriousness, we must assume a character of the past known to the real author and to his constituency as

worthy of the rôle here assigned him, and we must also assume for the writer himself a creative genius which would surely leave its mark on the life, as well as on the literature, of the time. But where do we find all this more fittingly than in a genuine Paul himself? The task of fabricating the material which lies before us in chapter after chapter of these letters, where the definiteness and vividness of an actual situation shows behind every sentence, is quite inconceivable.²⁹ The force of one strong and distinctive personality predominates throughout the main part of the Pauline literature, whether this individual is viewed from the standpoint of his activity, or in his capacity of thinker and writer. That an impersonator should create a character so unique in personality, and yet so verisimilar in all the relations of life, that minute yet sometimes insignificant details about him should be told without any attempt to depict his career in full, that he should be assigned some phases of thought which history in the next generation was compelled to set aside, is scarcely within the range of possibility. The historicity of Paul and the genuineness of the principal Pauline letters is supported by the data of both external and internal testimony; and if, say, only the letter to the Galatians, or one of the Corinthian epistles, is genuine, the existence of a historical Jesus would seem to be amply attested.

Yet it has been said that a reader who had not prejudged the question would not be likely to suppose that the apostle ever thought of an earthly Jesus.³⁰ A few passages from the more important Pauline writings may show the impropriety of this statement. Paul speaks of Jesus as "born of the seed of David,

²⁹ Speaking of the failure of the extreme negative criticism to supply an adequate historical setting for the phenomena, J. Weiss says: "Woher diese Stoffe und Gedanken, wer hat denn die Person des Paulus und seine Briefe ersonnen, wer war dieser Genius? Eine plötzliche anonyme Produktivität erhebt sich, ein Konfluxus von Geist und Begeisterung wächst aus dem Boden, man weiss nicht, woher er kommt. Und das alles muss in wenigen Dezennien fertig geworden sein, denn es ist dann da und lässt sich nicht mehr ableugnen." Further: "Man sollte einmal diesen Radikalen die Aufgabe stellen, ein oder zwei Kapitel, etwa 2. Kor. 4 oder 10, aus der Seele eines Fälschers heraus Wort für Wort zu erklären—dann würden sie schon merken, wie unmöglich das ist, wie gänzlich unschablonenhaft und ungekünstelt, wie springend und augenblicksmässig hier alles ist."—*Jesus von Nazareth*, 94 and 100.

³⁰ Drews, *Christusmythe*³, 158.

according to the flesh";³¹ in contrast with Adam, whose disobedience brought condemnation upon his descendants, Jesus is the "man" through whom God's grace abounds toward believers;³² he was crucified, and this fact became for Paul the cornerstone of interpretation;³³ specific events in connection with his death—the last meal eaten with his disciples and his betrayal—were remembered;³⁴ Paul also knew of a company of followers whose sadness was turned into joy by an experience which they regarded as evidence of Jesus' resurrection;³⁵ and these events had taken place in recent times, Paul having personal acquaintance with relatives and friends of this Jesus.³⁶ The reality of an earthly Jesus, according to these sample passages, seems to be an indisputable presupposition of Paul's thinking, a reality both for him and for his contemporaries. Although he speculates boldly upon the question of Jesus' significance, emphasizing on the one side his pre-existence and on the other his heavenly exaltation, nevertheless Jesus' appearance upon earth in truly human form, the lowliness and naturalness of his life, and his submission to death on the cross are basal historic facts without which Paul's interpretation of Jesus would have been impossible.

We must admit that Paul stood too near to the age which professed to know Jesus, to be successfully hoodwinked on the historical question. If Jesus never lived it is not at all probable that even the most enterprising propagandists could have succeeded in persuading Paul of the reality of this mythical person within the generation to which Paul himself belonged. But another possibility presents itself. Did he not deliberately create this historical character to suit his own scheme of interpretation; instead of being deceived was he not playing the part of a myth-maker? The absence from his letters of any effort to argue for the historicity of Jesus, which would surely be a matter of dispute at least with the opponents of Christianity, together with the prevailing acknowledgment that a historical person had been known by certain leaders of the new movement before Paul's

³¹ Rom. 1:3.

³² Rom. 5:12 ff.

³³ I Cor. 2:2.

³⁴ I Cor. 11:23 ff.

³⁵ I Cor. 15:5 ff.

³⁶ Cf. I Cor. 15:6; Gal., chap. 2.

conversion, seems an overwhelming objection to this supposition. Not only does Paul everywhere take for granted the existence of a Jesus whose memory is fresh in men's minds, but a good part of his attention is given to resisting opponents who claim superiority over him because they have been, or have received their commission from men who had been, personal companions of Jesus—a fact which Paul never denies, though he disputes the legitimacy of the inference regarding superiority which they deduce from the fact. Paul would scarcely have engaged so seriously in the controversy with the legalists, or have had so much anxiety for the possible outcome of the Judaizers' efforts to undo his work on gentile soil, if the chief credential of the "pillars," namely, their claim to have known Jesus personally, was all a fiction.

From all these data we are able to deduce but one conclusion. Not only is Paul a genuine personality who strongly impressed himself upon the life of his time, and some of whose thoughts are preserved for us in fragments of correspondence with his churches, but the historicity of Jesus is also a prerequisite to Paul's Christian life and work. While the apostle freely interpreted, and at times no doubt greatly idealized, the person of Jesus, there never was a time when to deny the reality of Jesus' earthly career would not have been a fatal shock to Paul's entire interpretative scheme. But such a disaster was in that day out of the question, for the age to which Paul belonged held the generation which had witnessed the career of Jesus and had experienced the force of his personality in its own life. Consequently his personal conduct became the model and the inspiration for conduct in the new community. Nor was this influence confined to those who had associated with him on earth; it was felt by future converts, of whom Paul was a conspicuous example. He strenuously emulated this type of life himself and strove constantly to inculcate it among the new converts to the faith. His exhortation to the Corinthians, in speaking against the self-seeking spirit, "be ye imitators of me even as I also am of Christ,"³⁷ is expressive of that spirit of service for "the profit of the many" which characterized Christianity from the first, and which was consistently traced back to the life of its

³⁷ I Cor. 11:1.

founder who, on calling disciples, had not offered them enticing rewards, but had given them an opportunity to become fishers of men, and had inspired them with the ideal of self-giving service: "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister, and whosoever would be first among you shall be servant of all."³⁸

A consideration of the gospels in this connection need not detain us long, since our problem is not to determine the full content of reliable information about Jesus but only to ask whether these writings testify at all reliably to the bare fact of his existence. That they purport to portray the career of a historical individual is self-evident; but does the portrait, on close inspection, show whether the artist painted from a model in real life or whether his creation was purely imaginative?

Here again a statement of the results of modern critical study regarding the historical origin of the gospels may have little or no weight with those who deny Jesus' historicity. The tradition of Papias seems to them "notoriously unreliable," while the efforts of literary criticism to discover the earliest elements in Mark, or to reconstruct the common non-Markan source or sources behind Matthew and Luke, are thought to be quite fanciful and devoid of trustworthy results historically. On the other hand, critical investigation furnishes some substantial conclusions for those who will treat seriously this type of evidence. The Gospel of Mark, though composed somewhat later than the letters of Paul, is seen to belong near enough to Jesus' own day to come within the lifetime of some of the original disciples; while the more extended reports of Jesus' teaching now found in Matthew and Luke seem unquestionably to have been derived from a common written tradition whose composition very probably antedates that of Mark. That is, the kernel of synoptic tradition dates from the same general period as Paul's letters, when the new religious movement was being propagated under the guidance of leaders who traced, either directly or indirectly, their authority as well as their inspiration to a period of personal association with an earthly Jesus whose personality had so strongly impressed them that they now, through the transforming influence of belief in his resurrec-

³⁸ Mark 10:43 f.

tion and heavenly exaltation, may have found it possible to heighten the story of his life by introducing large and bold interpretative features. To assume the fictitiousness of the earthly Jesus takes away both the objective of and the incentive for their interpretation; while to assert in their day—or at any other time for that matter—the historicity of a fictitious Jesus, will surely have called forth a corresponding apologetic on the part of the devotees of the new faith. But of this there is never a hint in any of the literature. On the contrary, the believers are constantly under the necessity of defending the elevated type of interpretation which their faith imposed upon this individual whose historicity was uniformly accepted as a matter of course.

It is significant that the earliest parts of gospel tradition contain the most realistic representation of Jesus. It is Mark who says that Jesus was not able to do any mighty work in Nazareth except to heal a few sick people by laying his hands on them, while in Matthew the statement is simply “he did not do many mighty works there.” In Mark, too, he refuses to be called “good,” while in Matthew the conversation concerns what “good thing” the young man shall do (*τί ἀγαθὸν ποιήσω*) in order to have eternal life. Again, Jesus appears in the primitive non-Markan source chiefly as a teacher rather than as a miracle-worker. In fact, the story of his career, as introduced in the temptation incident of this source, begins by his deliberately setting aside the idea of miraculous display as a means of self-attestation. This is an early type of interpretation which still reflects the prevailingly normal character of Jesus’ actions; and yet ardent faith in his present heavenly lordship made it necessary to explain why so significant an individual had not lived a more striking and outwardly brilliant career on earth. Naturally believers could not but suppose that he had possessed unique power, hence he must have deliberately refrained from its use. As time removed the memory of his actual life farther into the past, the difficulty was met by so interpreting his activity as to show actual demonstrations of his unique power. Thus in Mark he figures prominently at the beginning as a worker of miracles; yet Mark is still sufficiently under the influence of the earlier tradition to remember that this

was no open sign of Jesus' uniqueness but only a hidden one, that is, the significance of Jesus' conduct was not understood at the time even by the disciples. Mark also records that Jesus refused to give an open sign when pressed to do so, but on turning to Matthew and Luke we find this refusal relieved by the modifying phrase "except the sign of Jonah."³⁹ This is naturally taken in Matthew as a reference to Jesus' resurrection, the event which had served as the great initial and transforming sign for the faith of the first believers. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus takes pains to display a long series of signs to attest his uniqueness, the culminating event being the resurrection of Lazarus. In its earliest stages gospel tradition had by no means shaken itself free from the restraining influence of the memory of Jesus as a historical individual, and only in course of time did his earthly features become less distinct as they were more and more overshadowed by the heavenly image upon which his devoted followers loved to gaze.

Especially significant as evidence for the existence of Jesus is Mark's almost uniform representation that Jesus during his lifetime is generally misunderstood, and that his real significance is rarely if ever fully appreciated even by his closest associates. The members of his own family think him beside himself, and even the Twelve show a remarkable dulness on nearly every occasion when his uniqueness might, seemingly, be easily perceived. When he would feed the four thousand they are as unsuspecting of the method he is about to employ as if they had not, only a short time before, witnessed his miraculous feeding of the five thousand. And after the second incident they are still without understanding, so that Jesus marvels, "Do ye not yet perceive neither understand, have ye your heart hardened?" When he casts out demons the latter speak of his messiahship in seemingly unmistakable terms, and Jesus apparently acknowledges the accusation in the disciples' presence, yet they attain no conviction of his messiahship until near the close of his career. Even then their understanding of it is very crude, and their confidence is quickly shaken by his arrest and death. Similarly they fail to comprehend his meaning when he teaches in parables; when the sick woman is healed by

³⁹ Mark 8:12; Matt. 16:4; 12:39; Luke 11:29.

touching his garment they are so stupid as to reprove him for asking who touched him; when he predicts his arrest, death, and resurrection, though he several times repeats the statement, they fail to grasp the idea; on the mount of transfiguration even the most favored of his associates are completely mystified; in the Garden of Gethsemane, in view of all that Jesus had said and the situation that recent events had brought about, they display amazing stupidity; and, finally, the women at the tomb depart astonished, silent, and fearful, notwithstanding the angel's explicit announcement of Jesus' resurrection. In all this Mark is clearly recognizing that Jesus produced no such impression upon his contemporaries as his later interpreters would have him produce on the minds of their hearers; but, by making men's blindness responsible for this failure, the early theologians could, at least partially, harmonize the history with their Christology. This situation will have arisen at a time when men were still living who knew that Jesus had been regarded by his personal companions less significantly than subsequent thought of him would presuppose. A writer who was entirely free to follow his fancy will scarcely have left Jesus in this position, or have introduced his readers to a picture that reflected so unfavorably upon the disciples. Had the primitive tradition been purely the product of fancy we should have had at first that free idealization which is more in evidence a generation or two later when death and time had largely removed the limitations which actual recollection of Jesus imposed upon his first interpreters.

Moreover, there were elements in the early tradition that were not thought especially creditable to Jesus, yet were too generally known to be ignored. These will certainly not have been created for him by his worshippers, and we may believe they will have been overlooked by his biographers in so far as circumstances permitted. We may place here such incidents as his refusal to be called good and his acknowledgment that he could not do any miracle in Nazareth, but perhaps no incident of this class gave interpreters more difficulty than his baptism by John. When the movements inaugurated by these leaders came into competition, as they certainly did in the course of time, the founders' relation to

one another inevitably became a subject of controversy. Christian tradition recognized the value of John's work, even affirming his greatness, according to a reported saying of Jesus; yet the tradition was careful to state that he who was least in the "kingdom" was greater than John. But it was a well-known fact that Jesus had originally been among John's followers—had indeed received baptism at John's hands. How, then, were Christian interpreters to save the supremacy of their master? Mark sees Jesus' superiority displayed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit received at this time—an experience after the manner of the spiritual outpouring attending the baptism of converts to the new faith. In Matthew Jesus has outgrown the necessity of baptism by John; he is already greater than John according to the latter's own acknowledgment. While the act did not primarily benefit him it did serve two useful purposes: it gave his sanction to baptism as a church ordinance, and it gave the assembled multitude an opportunity to hear the divine testimony to Jesus' messiahship—a result which the scribe effected by changing Mark's "thou art" into "this is" my beloved son. In the Fourth Gospel the benefit of the baptism accrues to John himself, in that he thus learns who the Messiah is to whom he is to turn over his own followers. Here, as usual, Christianity triumphed by absorbing that which at first opposed it, but the very fact that it acknowledged the existence of these and similar difficulties shows that it was dealing with the tradition of a real person, the known facts of whose life did not always harmonize offhand with the interests of primitive Christology.

If space permitted, further evidence for Jesus' historicity might be deduced from the verisimilar type of his personality as seen in the earliest sources, and especially from his forceful individuality as revealed in his life of loyal service for humanity and in his simple yet profoundly significant religious teaching. To find this ideal without a historical Jesus—as to create Paul without Paul—is a problem which those who deny Jesus' historicity seem to have treated far too superficially. In fact, the very existence of the early Christian community is itself one of the most substantial evidences of his existence. It has been urged that ideas, not persons, are the important elements in the origin of Christianity.

Certainly ideas do figure prominently in the history of Christianity, but to presuppose a moment at the beginning when the idea as an abstract entity exerted a uniquely creative influence is hardly in accord with the ascertainable facts of history in general, much less with Christian tradition which so uniformly credits the incentive for the new movement to the individuality of Jesus. While ideas certainly played a considerable part in the formation of the new religion as a system of thought, its success must be credited primarily to those forceful personalities who championed these ideas. For instance, Paul the individual is a much more significant factor in the propagation of Christianity in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece than is Paul the theologian. And we find Paul constantly harking back to a type of life exemplified in Jesus; here was the personal embodiment and the source of inspiration of his ideal, and not of his alone, but of all who were adherents of the new faith. Each became, according to individual ability, a coefficient of the Jesus life.

Only a historical Jesus, whose personality impressed itself vividly upon his followers, explains the vital element in the new religion. To be sure, current types of thought and ritualistic formalities were employed in the attempt at self-expression, but the starting-point of theology and ritual, as well as of literary activity and religious impulse, was the memory of an earthly Jesus.